



Safe Usage of Reusable Bags and Bottles

Shelley Swenson, Extension Agent III, Family and Consumer Sciences UF-IFAS Wakulla County Extension

For as long as I have worked in Wakulla County, I have frequently written about our need to look for ways to live more sustainably. I enjoy people stopping me at the supermarket to show me their reusable shopping bag while others try to hide their plastic one-time water bottle or Styrofoam cup as they join me in a meeting. As with all Extension programming, we are the messengers and our audience are those who want more information and are willing to make behavior changes based on the information shared. Everyone must decide how sustainable they want to live and weigh that decision on the effort that they must extend to do so.

Reusable grocery bags are such an easy way to cut down on landfill waste but we also have to consider the food safety aspect of their use. Reusable bags may reduce waste, but they are not always food safe. The fabric or materials in reusable grocery bags can get contaminated with germs like *Salmonella* or *E.coli* from food. These germs could then cross-contaminate other food and make us sick. When using reusable grocery bags consider these reminders related to food safety practices. Wash your reusable grocery bags often. Always put raw meats into a disposable plastic bag before putting them in a reusable bag. This bag can be used to line a trash container at home or you can return it to be recycled when you return to the store. Keep your meats, fresh produce and ready-to-eat foods separated. Do not use reusable grocery bags for other purposes. Only leave your bags in the car if you know they are clean. The hot car provides an excellent environment for germs to grow and then contaminate foods when utilized. Store them in a cool, dry, clean place!

I am proud to say that I am seeing more people carrying around reusable water bottles. These bottles are made of glass, metal or sturdy plastic making them more durable and thus reusable than your typical disposable water bottle. Reusable water bottles are not just a fashion trend; they are a conscious move toward more sustainable living. When you adopt their use, remember to wash them often in hot water. Many are not intended to be washed in a dishwasher but they do need to be thoroughly cleaned especially if family members choose from a family collection of reusable bottles.

Reusable water bottle are sustainable because they reduce the plastic waste created by disposable water bottles, the demand for the oil used to make the plastic for disposable bottles and the demand for the fuel used to transport bottles from manufacturer to consumer.

Less than 25% of plastic water bottles are recycled meaning that more than 75% ends up in landfills or as litter. Since plastic water bottles in landfills aren't exposed to sunlight, which normally helps break down plastic, some estimate that it may take thousands of year for disposable water bottles to decompose.

While some people prefer the taste of bottled water to tap water, one has to wonder whether taste is worth the fuel and resources that go into transporting water hundreds or even thousands of miles to the consumer. And, if you are worried about safety, keep in mind that tap water is regulated more stringently than bottled water.

Reusable water bottles are also more economically sustainable because tap water is considerably less expensive than bottled water. If taste is an issue, try filtering tap water at home with a pitcher or faucet system and bringing it with you in your reusable water bottle. You will look hip while doing it!